

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for applying policy restrictions on a piece of data, wherein the policy restrictions are automatically applied to the piece of data, the method comprising:
defining one or more subsets of potential users of the piece of data;
defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users;
accepting the piece of data;
determining whether the piece of data is to be used by a user of the subset of potential users; and
applying the defined policy restrictions to the piece of data if the piece of data is to be used by a user of the subset of the potential users.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the piece of data is an electronic mail (e-mail) communication.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the defined subset of potential users is an e-mail distribution list.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the defined subset of potential users is based on common user account attributes.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on sending the piece of data to a user.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on saving the piece of data to a persistent storage medium.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on outputting the piece of data to a hard-copy format.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on producing a copy of the piece of data.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on accessing the piece of data subsequent to condition for expiration of the piece of data.
10. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for performing a method for applying policy restrictions on a piece of data, wherein the policy restrictions are automatically applied to the piece of data, the method comprising:
defining one or more subsets of potential users of the piece of data;
defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users;
accepting the piece of data;

determining whether the piece of data is to be used by a user of the subset of potential users; and

applying the defined policy restrictions to the piece of data if the piece of data is to be used by a user of the subset of the potential users.

11. A method for applying policy restrictions on a piece of data, wherein the policy restrictions are automatically applied to the piece of data, the method comprising:
defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of the piece of data;
defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential attributes;
accepting the piece of data;
determining whether the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes; and
applying the defined policy restrictions to the piece of data if the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes.
12. The method of claim 11 wherein the piece of data is an e-mail communication.
13. The method of claim 11 wherein the defined subset of potential attributes is based on an author and a recipient of the piece of data.
14. The method of claim 11 wherein the defined subset of potential attributes is based on the piece of data's content.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on sending the piece of data to a user.
16. The method of claim 11 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on saving the piece of data to a persistent storage medium.
17. The method of claim 11 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on outputting the piece of data to a hard-copy format.
18. The method of claim 11 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on producing a copy of the piece of data.
19. The method of claim 11 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on accessing the piece of data subsequent to condition for expiration of the piece of data.
20. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for performing a method for applying policy restrictions on a piece of data, wherein the policy restrictions are automatically applied to the piece of data, the method comprising:
 - defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of the piece of data;
 - defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential attributes;
 - accepting the piece of data;

determining whether the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes; and

applying the defined policy restrictions to the piece of data if the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes.

21. A method for applying policy restrictions on a piece of data, wherein the policy restrictions are automatically applied to the piece of data, the method comprising:
defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of an environment of the piece of data;
defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential attributes;
accepting the piece of data;
determining whether the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes; and
applying the defined policy restrictions to the piece of data if the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes.
22. The method of claim 21 wherein the piece of data is an e-mail communication.
23. The method of claim 21 wherein the defined subset of potential attributes is based on a time of day.
24. The method of claim 21 wherein the defined subset of potential attributes is based on a date.

25. The method of claim 21 wherein the defined subset of potential attributes is based on network traffic conditions.
26. The method of claim 21 wherein the defined subset of potential attributes is based on a recipient of the piece of data being on-line when accessing the piece of data.
27. The method of claim 21 wherein the defined subset of potential attributes is based on a system configuration of a recipient of the piece of data.
28. The method of claim 21 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on sending the piece of data to a user.
29. The method of claim 21 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on saving the piece of data to a persistent storage medium.
30. The method of claim 21 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on outputting the piece of data to a hard-copy format.
31. The method of claim 21 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on producing a copy of the piece of data.

32. The method of claim 21 wherein the policy restrictions comprise restrictions on accessing the piece of data subsequent to condition for expiration of the piece of data.
33. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for performing a method for applying policy restrictions on a piece of data, wherein the policy restrictions are automatically applied to the piece of data, the method comprising:
defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of an environment of the piece of data;
defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential attributes;
accepting the piece of data;
determining whether the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes; and
applying the defined policy restrictions to the piece of data if the piece of data possesses an attribute of the subset of potential attributes.
34. A method for creating policy restrictions to be automatically applied to a piece of data, the method comprising:
defining one or more subsets of potential users of the piece of data; and
defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users.

35. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for performing a method for creating policy restrictions to be automatically applied to a piece of data, the method comprising:
- defining one or more subsets of potential users of the piece of data; and
- defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users.
36. A method for creating policy restrictions to be automatically applied to a piece of data, the method comprising:
- defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of the piece of data; and
- defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users.
37. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for performing a method for creating policy restrictions to be automatically applied to a piece of data, the method comprising:
- defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of the piece of data; and
- defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users.
38. A method for creating policy restrictions to be automatically applied to a piece of data, the method comprising:
- defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of an environment of the piece of data; and
- defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users.

39. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for performing a method for creating policy restrictions to be automatically applied to a piece of data, the method comprising:
- defining one or more subsets of potential attributes of an environment of the piece of data; and
- defining policy restrictions for the subset of potential users.